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By-Sledd, James

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The recent history and present state of linguistics in the English classroom present a dismal prospect. The structural-grammar textbooks of the forties and fifties were inadequate, and the grammars of the sixties, although improved by the influence of Chomsky and his colleagues, are still not as good as they should be. Also of questionable value are the efforts of conferences, curriculum centers, and summer institutes sponsored by the "Establishment." To improve conditions, frank but constructive opposition to current establishment-produced materials and procedures must be made by our best scholars, linguists, and teachers, for teachers themselves must ultimately determine what they are to teach. Simple obstructionism, however, is not the answer. The current emphasis on the importance of language studies requires that teachers decide either to teach the English language and educate themselves for the task or to relinquish the task to someone else. Goals that can be obtained despite the present dearth of adequate language-teaching materials should be made. Among the topics that can be taught well, now, are a scholarly and intelligent traditional grammar, lexicography, history of the language, and dialectology. (JM)

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LAST FEBRUARY at the ninth annual conference of the California Association of Teachers of English, Dr. James Sledd delivered the following paper at the first general session. It caused considerable comment. Although at first glance a negative and pessimistic view of the present state of the profession, it becomes obvious, upon reflection, that Dr. Sledd in his honest and fearless assessment is saying what needs to be said and, perhaps, what many of us would like to say if we were not caught up in the dictates of the Establishment and bogged down in our conventional roles.

Schoolroom Linguistics: The Hazardous Transformation

JAMES SLEDD, *University of Illinois*

If I were genuinely honest, I would not be here; but that realization came after I had agreed to talk when I had nothing to say. I am not proud of the ensuing emptinesses, which are one pedagogue's attempt to assess the present state of the campaign for English linguistics in the schools and to make some platitudinous suggestions for the future.

The account begins, not altogether arbitrarily, with the years after World War II, when the campaigners for structuralism had a message but no textbooks. Fries' *Structure of English,* and the Trager-Smith *Outline of English Structure,* made structural textbooks look easy to put together. Popularizers went through those two volumes with religious zeal, as graduate students now argue universal grammar; and the books tempted us to homiletic efforts of our own because their high secrets were so neatly paired: we got our syntax out of Fries, our phonology from Smith and Trager, our bits and pieces of morphology from both. Within six or eight years, six or eight small grammars made six or eight small reputations.

Our little grammars weren't really very good. The doctrines of our leaders, when we set out to expound them, were somehow not so clear and final as we had hoped; and my own text (out of date when it was published), was an uneasy combination of structuralism and the tradition, with Chomsky in a footnote. The more successful popularizations were purer in their devotion to structuralism, but perhaps no more original (if I can judge honestly in such matters) and no more enlightening. I think people should quit using the structural texts except as historical exhibits. Intellectually they are as dead as "phonological syntax," the least useful syntactic theory of the structuralist fifties, and they have given too many people the idea that the grammar of our language was never rightly understood outside America or before the age of structuralism vulgarized.

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The textbooks of the sixties, where English linguistics is concerned, are not so much better than those of the fifties as they ought to be. There are more of them, happily, including big new series for the secondary schools and even for the grades, and no series, not even the most traditional, can avoid at least a bow in the direction of the linguists; but quality has not kept up with quantity, either in the schoolbooks or in the compendia of exhortation and information for prospective teachers. The chief improvement is due, significantly, to scholars not manipulators, to the influence of Chomsky and his colleagues, who have given new range and depth to theoretical discussions and have provided substantial fragments (though substantially changing fragments) of an English grammar. Yet it is not enough for our textbook-makers to put themselves to school to M. I. T. They must know something about English in general as well as a good deal about the structure and history of our language, and they must know enough about teaching and writing to make their knowledge accessible and significant to their intended audience. Few of us observe such geniuses in our shaving-mirrors.

None of us, we must hope, will live to see another decade of secure faith in apparently firm dogma. There is something to be said for today's diversity of textbooks, though much of it is undoubtedly diversity in error. Available series for the schools may be traditional, structural, transformational, traditional-structural, or structural-transformational; and the uncertainty which this incomplete Polonian catalogue reflects forbids most publishers to risk too big an omelet in any one basket and so imposes upon school men the necessity of choice. Choosing a textbook today is a little like shopping for a patent medicine: one wonders how disease can be so prevalent when there are so many sovereign remedies.

The claims are too high because our standards are too low. Of our four most recent histories of the language, the two that claim the most are by far the worst; two eminent scholars have recently told us all about linguistics and English grammar or (more generally) about linguistics and the teaching of English without adding a great deal to our knowledge or to their reputations; and ten years after *Syntactic Structures* there is still no really good popularizing textbook in transformational grammar, neither for grammar schools nor for high schools nor for colleges. That is understandable—at least I find it so, for I've always found the transformationists hard going, and experience has taught me how easy bad textbooks are to write. What *isn't* understandable is the ballyhoo, the low standards that allow a minor catastrophe to be treated as a major triumph. Over twenty per cent of the high schools in Texas, we are told, have recently adopted a structural grammar based on Fries

and on Trager and Smith. Since the adoption is for five years, young Texans will be studying structural grammar partly misunderstood, and partly taught by partly prepared teachers, as late as 1971. The adoption has still been called a "major breakthrough."

The history of our textbooks for the past twenty years is thus a history of great activity and mild accomplishment, and it is not only the publishers and their field-hands who have been busy. Sputnik persuaded the Establishment that we would have to hurry if the dialect of the moon is to be Germanic and not Slavic; and the professional societies, the foundations, and the government quickly united in this high undertaking—*e pluribus unum,* one and indivisible, as the CIA has just managed to remind us. There was no reason, of course, why the reminder should have been shocking. Like our students, our faculties went on the government payroll a good while ago, and throughout the past decade we have vigorously lived up to our humanistic belief that there is nothing bad but money makes its better. The waste has been appalling, especially on conferences, where the same complacent people sit down together, again and again, to spend a few more million and hatch another tympanitic volume. The Dartmouth Conference will be more fully recorded than the Last Supper.

In general, then, the principal accomplishment of a frightened and inept Establishment has been just what one might expect. It has talked endlessly, spent vigorously, and taken care to solidify its own position and to destroy the independence of our educational system. Yet that is not all the Establishment has done. To speak only of things that are relevant to the campaign for linguistics, its subsidies have established a new specialty, defining English; and our specialized Establishmentarians quickly rooted out the basic issues and discovered that whatever English is, it is a fundamental liberal discipline with a fundamental need for liberal grants. From the astonishing discovery that we try to teach people to read and write English, they drew the shrew conclusion that we teach language, literature, and composition; and having settled our intellectual problems in that fashion, they went on to inquire how we too could construct a cumulative, integrated, and sequential course of study. Predictably from such thinking, they found our unity at the most superficial level, and the campaign for linguistics in the schools got a great boost when "the language-centered curriculum" became the cliché of the hour. But the relevance of linguistics to our teaching of literature and composition, though perfectly real, is also limited. Most of our practical problems cannot even be stated in linguistic terms. Nobody ever got far by talking to a class about the imperative morpheme in "Go, bid the soldiers shoot" or "Pray you, undo this button." Linguistics is none the worse for that.

The devising of the new integrated curricula has been mainly the business of the government's Curriculum Centers. My personal experience of one of these establishments was profoundly dismal, but much too slight to support any general estimate of their value. It may not be a fair comment that the highest degree of integration in one of the most carefully integrated programs is achieved by the cunning scheme of teaching the history of English literature and the history of the English language in the same year, and the fact that a historical accident cannot be integrated need not prevent all good results from the futile effort. Unquestionably the Curriculum Centers will produce some good materials, including good materials for the teaching of the English language.

The best materials will be butchered by bad teachers. The chief obstacle to the teaching of the English language in our schools is that most teachers don't know enough (through no fault of their own) about the language and have been persuaded that they have no need to learn; but in the colleges and universities we are much quicker to hold a conference or pocket a packet for a Curriculum Center than we are to build a solid major. College professors are incredibly pampered and privileged, and though they scream bloody murder when their budget's cut, most of them still don't give a hoot for what happens in the schools: they want to devote their energies, as they always have, to reproduction—to teaching their favorite subject to small classes at the highest level. An English department is likely to assign its weakest sisters to the special courses for prospective teachers.

For that reason, among others, a great deal of the responsibility for improving teaching by improved education of teachers has been shifted to summer institutes and week-end courses, most notably to the summer institutes. These were pioneered, as the saying goes, by the College Entrance Examination Board, that strong arm of the Establishment whose examinations determine the fate of thousands of youngsters but cannot be publicly discussed. As far as the teaching of the English language is concerned, the result has been equivocal. A teacher gives as little as one-third of a six- or eight-week summer course to the English language —and then qualifies as his school's expert on the subject, perhaps even as a teacher in the institute next summer. Last spring's conference in Washington for the language-teacher in last summer's institutes invited a miracle, so many blind men were leading the blinder; yet institutes have been allowed to divert attention from the bad preparation which too many young teachers get as undergraduates. Institutes could be splendid—for teachers whose original preparation was adequate to good. They do real harm when they take the heat off colleges where teacher-preparation is inadequate to dreadful.

One last result of the Establishment's activities remains to be mentioned. If the campaign for linguistics in the schools has accomplished nothing else, it has created vast unrest and an itch for change. Whatever teachers are doing, they are told, they are doing it badly, and the financial success of a few highly publicized experiements has convinced administrators that there's money in innovation. We must expect a series of unprepared lunges, by states and cities, into the New Linguistics. The failure of such lunges is guaranteed by inadequate textbooks, unprepared teachers, overheated expectations; but perhaps the Establishment, which never admits failure, can convince us that nothing that pays can be bad. Otherwise we are in for some disagreeable retractations.

So much for the critical part of the threatened emptinesses. The supposedly revolutionary structural textbooks of the fifties, I have said, have turned out to be wrong. In the Chomskyan sixties, textbooks are much more numerous, and somewhat better, but their standards remain too low and their claims too high. Meanwhile our educational Establishment has grown like Jack's beanstalk, though with no giant at the top. A good many of the Establishmentarians have joined the campaign for schoolroom linguistics, providing us with some good teaching materials from Curriculum Centers and with some opportunities for in-service training in summer institutes; but a great deal of energy and money has been wasted in exhortation, the initial preparation of teachers has not been made adequate, and rash experiments have been inaugurated with imperfect textbooks and with staffs unready and sometimes unwilling. The millennium is not yet.

But Puck made no exceptions when he cried out, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" Constructive proposals are ever so much harder to make than sharp-tongued objections, and hardest of all is to keep one's sense of humor and proportion in judging one's own darling schemes. If the status-seeker is quick to approve of whatever offers him status, the loner (who may be an inverted status-seeker) is ill-tempered, querulous, suspicious, too eager to announce that the profession has pretty much sold out to Washington but that he in his lonely virtue disapproves of conferences, institutes, the language-centered curriculum, lazy professors, the College Entrance Examination Board, and big claims for small accomplishments. He spends so much time objecting that he never gets any work done, and nobody could prove, by his example, that the kookaburra or laughing jackass is really a halcyon.

But cowardice is no way out of a foolish promise, which may as well be made useful if it can. Our best scholars in literary history and criticism, our best writers and teachers of writing, our best English lin-

guists are not the men who represent us in the educational Establishment. Our Establishmentarians generally are smaller people; yet they have great power, and power easily convinces men who have it or want it that its possession confers wisdom. The greatest danger to English education in this country is just the Establishment which supposedly promotes it. If we are convinced of our own superiority, and if our happiness is a seat at a conference table, we will confuse the first class with the third and be always ready to lead the rest of the world by the nose for the rest of the world's own good. A foolish promise may not be irredeemable if it is used to say that we have too many people like that in this country. Even in our little world of English teaching, where stakes are small, you've got to go along to get along, butter the boys (if you want to be one of them) and repeat their catchwords; and where the campaign for linguistics is concerned, some of the Establishmentarians should be had up for false advertising. If we mean all our humanistic moralism, the first thing we ought to do is to insist that our minds are ours and won't be made up for us—not by the respectable around their mahogany tables, not by the government, the foundations, the professional societies, the high-pressuring publishers, the deans and chairmen. It's teachers, not administrators or other politicians, who should decide what teachers teach. They have to teach it.

The majority of English teachers in the majority of schools today would probably vote not to teach the English language. It is foolish to try to force them to against their will. They probably can't be forced, they shouldn't be if they could, and anyway unwilling teaching is sure to be bad teaching. Yet teachers who still value such freedom as they keep ought to see that mere obstructionism is quite sterile. When so many people are urging the importance of language-studies, a conscientious teacher will want to find out why, and so a second thing we can do is to educate ourselves—go back to school, either literally or in whatever spare time moonlighting leaves us with. It won't be easy. The important developments in English linguistics recently have been theoretical. They are hard to follow, and often inconclusive; a lot of false starts are made, and despite the soothing false assurances of the propagandists, we can't expect any quick consensus among the scholars, any pronouncement that those who accept a few articles of faith are saved. We simply have to do our best to keep up—or catch up, which can be agony for the middle-aged; and at the same time we should use what influence we have to make sure that our junior colleagues are better prepared than most of us have been. The colleges never get tired of telling the schools what to do: now and then the schools should tell the colleges—like telling them that their present English majors are as feeble as majors in speech

or in education. People ought not to smile gently and say oh when we tell them our degrees were in English.

Does all that seem dreadfully unpleasant? Probably; and a third suggestion is equally painful. We have to make up our minds either to do these things or not to do them; but if we choose not to teach our language, we'll likely have to stand aside and let somebody else. Somebody is going to teach it, because the speech that makes us human deserves teaching. We have the right to refuse, which nobody should deny us; but if we do refuse, or if we do the job as miserably as we now do, we mustn't complain if foreign languages takes over, or math, or social studies, or even (God help us!) an "interdisciplinary" group. If we call language-study corn and say we don't like it, we mustn't expect to keep our snout in that manger.

Suppose we make up our minds to make the effort, and suppose we educate ourselves so that we aren't ashamed to enter a language classroom. What do we do then? One answer, harsh but prudent, is that we mustn't try too much. At the moment, the very best high schools in the country would find it hard to staff a good course in the English language, and if they could find a staff, they would still have to scramble for good materials. Besides, when they had planned and staffed their course, they would have to expect that no matter what they taught or how, somebody would tell them that they had chosen wrong. To announce an ambitious language-centered curriculum today would be as absurd as to announce our immortality in this flesh: the facts would be against us.

There remains a good deal that we have cause and strength and means (if we have will) to do. We could make a small improvement in our present bad situation by teaching any familiar form of systematic grammar instead of the so-called functional grammar, the bits-and-pieces grammar of errors which educationalists have sold us; and we should not be afraid, despite the National Council of Witch-Doctors, to base our teaching partly on the big standard grammars and histories, the big old books which no big new ones are likely to replace very soon. We should not be afraid to base our teaching on them, partly—not wholly, because there *is* new knowledge, and new speculation, of which we and our pupils ought to be aware. Though a scholarly, intelligent traditional grammar is (I think) the best that most schools can hope to teach for at least the next few years, no grammarian can call himself intelligent or scholarly if he simply turns his back on the present day. I myself am not going to teach a lot of things which everyone tells me I should, like the now familiar business about pre-articles or the analysis of the passive as a manner adverbial; yet I should hope that every teacher of grammar

would *know* those analyses and that the real insights of the transformational grammarians would make their way into even the traditionally based course. Even in the recognition that grammars and theories of grammar are going to keep changing with bewildering speed, that much that is presently believed will be disbelieved tomorrow, and that the innate religiosity of linguists will make them present each of their new ideas in turn as Eternal Verity—even in that recognition the best high schools might already want to go all out for a transformational grammar.

And grammar isn't all that somebody in our high schools (ourselves or others) should be teaching about our language. There are useful materials lying about in lexicography, in the history of the language, in dialectology. Teaching students how to use a good dictionary is not time wasted, and they could get some understanding of their society by considering the contrasted receptions accorded Webster's scholarly though sometimes misguided *Third,* the Random House slick-paper *Dictionary,* and Mr. Follett's pontifical *American Usage.* In dialectology, they might be brought to ask how the middle-class liberal can reconcile his middle-class linguistic snobbery with his middle-class liberalism, and they might come to see that dialect differences in twentieth-century America involve a great deal more than snake doctors and mosquito hawks. I do not see, myself, how so many compassionate teachers can tell the little Negro child that he must turn his back on the speech of his friends and family if he wants to live in the white man's world: our plans for the poorer youngsters sound to me like impossible doubletalk, forcing them to talk like the richer ones but never admitting that that's what we are doing. As for the history of the language, we certainly don't have to wait until it's been rewritten transformationally before we start to teach it. We could do something to break down our customary provincialism merely by placing English among the thousands of languages around the world, by asking what gave it its unique importance, how language contact has affected it, and what are the values and significance of languages national and international. There is plenty that we can do in the rich field of linguistics, and do within prudent limits, immediately.

Of course if we try to do it, even prudently, we are taking a chance. As always, we are taking the chance of failure: our virtuous schoolroom linguistics, so far, has not proved itself too much better than our sinful schoolroom grammar, and if we commit ourselves to the hazardous transformation, we are risking our self-esteem, our serenity (such as it is) and whatever grace and poise we have managed to keep. Yet most of us learned long ago, one would suppose, that between womb and tomb there's no security but only life. We don't need vast sums, or medicine

men from over the mountains, to get us started. Instead of a Federal grant, it's better to have a local administrator who'll cut down on the enormous waste of his teachers' time and energy, on the paperwork, the endless meetings, the film festivals and folderol that get in the way of serious work. It's best of all to have a lively staff, which hasn't been anesthetized by talk about corruption of the language and the moral effects of literary study and the immoral effects of linguists. For the real question that we face, as we try to assess the campaign for linguistics, turns out to be a question of our own personal quality. We can choose not to teach the language, and take the consequences of that choice. We can choose to teach it, and face our ignorance, and run the risk of failure. But we have to choose, decide, make up our own minds, not drift. Otherwise we are indeed what the Establishment thinks we are: so many dummies.

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